

Message #6**II Corinthians 2:5-11**

When the pastoral search committee of this church asked me to appear at a meeting to be interviewed back in 1998, the first question they asked me was whether or not I had read their constitution and I answered “yes.” The second question they asked me was whether or not I agreed with their constitution and I answered “no.” The committee looked somewhat surprised and one of them said, “Just exactly what is it that you do not agree?” I said I do not agree with your statement about the purpose of church discipline. You state that the primary purpose of discipline is the restoration of the individual and Paul teaches in I Corinthians 5:6-8 that the primary purpose of discipline is the purity of the church.

Now it is a wonderful thing if the person under discipline comes to his senses and responds and gets back on track. It is a wonderful thing if eventually there can be restoration. But it is not the first reason for church discipline. The first reason is to keep the church pure.

When you carefully read through the New Testament, it is quite clear that one of the marks of a true church is that, when it is necessary, it will carry out Church Discipline. Actually, there are many passages that speak about this theme—Matthew 18:15-17; Acts 5:1-11; Romans 16:17-18; I Corinthians 5:1-13; Galatians 6:8-9; I Thessalonians 5:14; II Thessalonians 3:14; Titus 1:9-13; II John 10; Revelation 2:20.

Now in many churches today the idea is “peace at any cost with everyone in the church.” Don’t take a stand and don’t make waves, just try to make everyone feel good regardless of who they are or what they are believing, doing or saying. That idea is not biblical and you cannot justify it when you study the Bible. Right from the beginning of the Church, God expected the Church to carry out church discipline and it is quite evident that the Corinthian church did just that under the direction of the Apostle Paul.

When Paul wrote his first epistle to the Corinthians there was a major discipline issue that had to be addressed. It is debated whether or not this is the same issue being addressed, which I tend to think it is. In fact, I find it interesting that those commentators who suggest this is not referring to the man in I Corinthians 5 all refer to the instruction of I Corinthians 5. The obvious conclusion is this is the same guy referred to here.

In I Corinthians 5, some guy was having an immoral relationship with his father’s wife and the guy was still coming to church as if nothing were wrong. Paul demanded that they remove the immoral person out of the church (I Corinthians 5:5, 13).

He wanted all fellowship cut off from this immoral brother and apparently the Corinthians had followed through and done that. The result was the discipline worked, but the Corinthians refused to take the guy back into fellowship. Now when he writes this section of Scripture in II Corinthians, about 1-2 years later, he says this:

YOU OBEYED AND DID WELL IN CARRYING OUT CHURCH DISCIPLINE AND IT HAS WORKED SO NOW RECEIVE THE ONE UNDER DISCIPLINE BACK INTO THE CHURCH.

Now before we begin the exposition of the text, there are two observations I want to make:

Observation #1 - Paul does not name the person.

We do not know who the person actually is by name and I would suspect when we get to heaven we will never know. Once the discipline is completed it is a done deal.

There is a place for naming people. In fact, Paul named several people in II Timothy who were not right with God. However, if the person responds and gets the life back on track, it is a done deal and the matter should be forgiven and forgotten.

Observation #2 - Paul does say discipline is a punishment. **2:6**

The word “punishment” (επιτιμια) means that this was a due measure penalty or punishment. It was an award for wrong action (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 176).

God does not take the position we should just forgive and forget when wrong is done. He does not promote a turn the other cheek to anything philosophy. God takes the position that in the church there needs to be a negative award given to one who does wrong, and then if the negative award causes the person to realize and admit the wrong he is to be forgiven and restored.

Now there are five key points about discipline Paul wants to make:

DISCIPLINE POINT #1 – Church discipline does affect the whole church. **2:5**

To God, the church is not some club that you join that offers trial memberships to see if you fit in. To God, the church is an interconnected body of brothers and sisters that form a community of relationships that features accountability and discipline.

This is the thing that so many people do not grasp. The church is not a place of “free-riding, ecclesiastical hitchhikers” who duck in for a short ride and then hop in somewhere else. We are a body of Christ and when the church has to hand out discipline, it makes the whole body sad. It is not something the church enjoys doing. In fact, church discipline is a sorrowful matter that should affect us all.

The verb “sorrow” means to cause real emotional pain, grief and distress (*Ibid.*, p. 272). The perfect tense of the verb indicates that from the moment this one was put under discipline right until the present time, this matter caused real pain and sorrow.

Now apparently, the one who had been disciplined had been attacking Paul and the church of Corinth thought that this discipline matter was really weighing Paul down emotionally. Paul says you don’t understand; church discipline is not about me, it is about you and the purity of the church.

Paul said you don't realize that the sin of one affects the whole church. The sorrow caused by the sin affected the whole church. This was not about Paul, it was about the church.

When a church is operating as it should, when someone falls into sin it will sadden and sorrow the whole church.

DISCIPLINE POINT #2 – Church discipline ought to have a sufficiency level. **2:6**

The adjective “sufficient” (ικανός) is one that means the discipline was competent, fit, enough. In other words, it was a satisfactory response to the sin issue (*Ibid.*, p. 215). Turning the one over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh had worked and the results were sufficient.

The majority of the people were all on the same page. The majority had cut off all fellowship from the individual and felt the discipline was sufficient. But there was a minority in the church who didn't agree that the discipline was enough.

Notice how **verse 7** begins with “on the contrary.” So some people in the church did not think the discipline was sufficient.

Whenever you must carry out church discipline there will always be a minority who march to the beat of their own thinking. There will always be, as Murray Harris said, “a dissenting minority” (*The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 229).

If the church requests that fellowship be cut off from an individual for disciplinary purposes, the majority will do it; but there will always be a minority who will rally around the offender as if he/she is some hero.

Also, when you carry out church discipline there will be another minority group of rigid, hard-core people in the church who want to make the person crawl for years. There will always be some who think one should do penance for years and years before they should be forgiven.

Both minority groups are wrong. Discipline, at times, needs to be carried out; but when it has worked, the discipline needs to be lifted and the person needs to be received back into fellowship.

DISCIPLINE POINT #3 – The one disciplined should be forgiven and comforted . **2:7**

We may assume from this verse that the discipline left this man in a sad and depressed condition.

Kent Hughes said that it is possible that the man was so depressed that he was “contemplating suicide” (*II Corinthians*, p. 50). Now that is what sin will do; it will leave you totally and completely depressed and that is what church discipline should do, cause the person to realize this. Apparently this man did realize this, so Paul says “forgive him and comfort him.”

Paul would have never said this if the man had not been broken. It was obviously a well-known fact that the man was deeply sorry over the fact that he had sinned and been excommunicated from the church. The discipline had worked. So Paul says “forgive” him and “comfort” him. C.S. Lewis said “Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have something to forgive.”

The word “forgive” (χαρίζομαι) is not the normal word for forgive. This word means to graciously show favor and kindness by granting full and free forgiveness (*Ibid.*, p. 479). This word would indicate this forgiveness is not earned nor merited. So they were not to grant forgiveness on the basis that he had earned it through the discipline. The word “comfort” (παρακαλέω) means to come along side to the aid and support of someone.

Paul says it is time to demonstrate some grace. It is time to forgive, comfort and restore. After all, think what God has done for us. **When a church chooses to forgive and comfort one who has dealt with sin, it displays exactly the kind of grace God demonstrates to us when we deal with sin.**

Now carefully observe, Paul says “you should” grant forgiveness, not “you must” grant forgiveness. Paul is suggesting, not demanding that they forgive this guy. Paul is making a recommendation. It would appear that the early church seemed to have a stricter view of discipline than even Paul had.

Paul is not invoking apostolic authority here, but he is leaving the final decision to the leaders of the church. The reason why he wanted this man forgiven and comforted was so that he would not be overwhelmed with sorrow.

Part of the job of the church is to make sure that people realize their sins can be forgiven and they can be restored. Even those who have committed horrific sins can be forgiven and restored.

There are several places in Scripture where this principle of church-related forgiveness is mentioned. Jesus, Himself, refers to it in Matthew 18:17-20 and John 20:23.

DISCIPLINE POINT #4 – The church should reaffirm their love for the one under discipline. **2:8**

The word “reaffirm” (κυρωω) is one that means to make valid and confirm something (*Ibid.*, p. 262). Paul wanted these Corinthians to validate and confirm their love (agape) for this brother.

Now “agape” love is the highest love. It is God’s kind of love for us that always does the best possible good for His people. When we lovingly rally around a repentant sinner who has faced up to his or her sin and we welcome them back into the church, we actually demonstrate the love of God.

DISCIPLINE POINT #5 – Paul informs the church about reasons for church discipline in the written Word. **2:9-11**

We know that one reason for church discipline is the purity of the church (I Cor. 5:6), but there are other reasons for it too:

Reason #1 - Matters of church discipline show whether a church will obey the written Word. **2:9**

Another reason for church discipline is to see whether or not a church will obey the written Scriptures. In other words, the matter of church discipline becomes a test as to whether or not a church will obey the written Word of God.

God will at times test a church to see whether or not it will obey His Word. God will give exams to His church to see whether or not His church will pass and one of the exams He gives is the exam of discipline. When it comes to carrying out church discipline, it will put a church to the test. Will the Elders and the congregation obey God's Word? Will the church follow through with what God's Word tells them to do?

Reason #2 - Matters of church discipline show whether a church understands forgiveness . **2:10**

Forgiveness is ALWAYS the way of grace. Now carefully observe here that things done in the church are done "in the presence of Christ." Paul was an apostle and he forgave many Corinthians many things because he realized he was in the presence of Christ and he admonished them to do the same.

Reason #3 - Matters of church discipline are opportunities to stifle Satan . **2:11**

Satan is a shrewd craftsman and he is out to get the upper hand in a church through sin issues and disciplinary issues. It seems to me that when it comes to disciplinary sin issues in the church Satan is after two extremes:

(Extreme #1) - Satan loves it when a church tolerates sin and does nothing about it.

Dr. Harry Ironside said that a pastor once came to him and said that he didn't know what to do with a very wealthy man on his board who kept a mistress in a motel, while he was breaking the heart of his wife and children. He said our church needs his money. Dr. Ironside said throw him out and let him take his tainted money with him, God doesn't need it (*II Corinthians*, p. 59).

Satan has the upper hand in a church where there is no accountability. Satan has the upper hand in a church in which people in sin can come in and not be held accountable. J. Vernon McGee said he knew of a minister who had been immoral with women in three different churches and the churches knew it and tolerated it and still let him be minister. Dr. McGee said, those churches shut their eyes to gross immorality (*II Corinthians*, p. 94).

Let me tell you two stories of things that happened in this church that most of you do not know. We had a couple coming to this church who we thought were husband and wife. When we learned that the wife was at home, we addressed it and the couple left. We have another situation in which a person was accused of being a window-peeker and when we started an investigation to find out facts they left. When some of these people left, we were getting questioned “why are people leaving?” as if we were the problem. We were protecting the purity of the church.

Now both couples are able to slide into another church and most churches will do nothing about it. In those churches, Satan has the upper hand. The church that permits people in blatant sin to participate in worship is satanic (Rev. 2:24).

(Extreme #2) - Satan loves it when a church does not tolerate sin and does something about it.

The other extreme that Satan wants is a rigid, legalistic organization that would carry out extreme forms of discipline. Satan loves the Islamic religion that will beat people and cut body parts off people to teach them a lesson.

Satan wants the church to throw people out so that they never come back but feel abused and used. He loves it when people who, at one time were faithful, feel like they can never do anything or become anything for God. Satan loves to make it so people think they would have to crawl back and even then be viewed as a second class member. **What Satan doesn't want the church to do is to carry out discipline in a way that demonstrates free grace.**

The Church of God is a wonderful place where God's people gather to study the Word and have good, clean, God-honoring fellowship. We are connected to each other as a real body and family. We are to be a place that demonstrates grace and forgiveness. However, we also must, at times, carry out discipline. Discipline in our own lives and in the life of the church.

There is not one person here today who is not capable of committing any sin. We are all capable of the vilest kinds of sins. It is only by God's grace that we do not cross those lines. When we hear of someone falling into sin, it should make us sad; but if the person faces the sin and asks for forgiveness we should be willing to demonstrate grace. Why? Because that is what God has done with us.

PARTING LESSONS:

- 1) The church is to be a place that will deal with surfaced sin.
- 2) The church is to be a place that will dish out biblical discipline.
- 3) The church is to be a place that will determine real repentance.
- 4) The church is to be a place that will demonstrate forgiveness, grace and restoration.

Do you know what we are here at church? We are not a group of people who have never failed; we are a group of sinners who admitted we failed and then fled to the grace and mercy of God for forgiveness.